

Buzzard Bay (Oyster Bay)

Buzzard Bay is located in the tidal marshes that form northern Smith Island. It was once accessible from the Atlantic Ocean through Corncake Inlet. At present, several creeks connect the Cape Fear River to the western and northern sides of the bay. The earliest map to show Buzzard Bay by name was drawn by Joshua Potts around 1797. It also appears by that name on the Price and Strother map (1807). From the 1850s to 1880s it was also known as Oyster Bay and first labeled under both names on a U.S. Coast Survey map (1857). From 1888 to the present, maps indicate it only as Buzzard Bay. Water depths within the bay are indicated as less than 7 feet on the current navigation map (Potts 1797; Price and Strother 1807; U. S. Coast Survey 1857b; U.S. Coast Survey 1866; USCGS 1886, 1944b; USCGS 1888; NOAA 1992; Powell 1968:78).

Muddy Slue

An area located among the creeks and marshes of northern Smith Island has been known as Muddy Slue since the mid-nineteenth century. Muddy Slue is first mentioned by name on a U.S. Coast Survey map from 1851 and shown on several other subsequent maps. Tidal creeks, including Bowensville, Middle, Shellbed, Still, and Burriss, flow into Muddy Slue. Some of the most recent maps of the vicinity show a change in the spelling of Slue to Slough (Powell 1968:341; U.S. Coast Survey 1851; USCGS 1944b; USGS 1970; NOAA 1992).

The Narrows and Five Fathom Hole

At a deep spot occurring naturally in the Cape Fear River near Snow's Marsh and Horseshoe Shoal were two places historically referred to as Five Fathom Hole and the Narrows. Although no map could be found to identify their exact location, an 1886 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report stated that Five Fathom Hole was located "opposite and above the head of Snow's Marsh." The earliest known reference to the two locations was in 1795. In that year the North Carolina commissioners of revenue authorized James Read to receive proposals for staking out a navigable channel in the Cape Fear River. One of the chosen locations where two stakes would be fixed was on the points of the shoal below Five Fathom Hole called the Narrows (Wilmington Chronicle and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser, October 22, 1795; USACOE-AR 1886:1014-15).

Nearly a century later these locations were again mentioned in a local newspaper. When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers abandoned the old Horseshoe Shoal channel, a new channel was dredged and renamed the Snows Marsh Channel. When completed in 1890, the new cut was made about 1,000 feet west of the Horseshoe Shoal channel and followed the natural course of the river through Five Fathom Hole to the deep water at Southport (Wilmington Weekly Star, June 14, 1890; Moseley 1733; Hyrne 1749; Price and Strother 1807).